

Beach Soundings

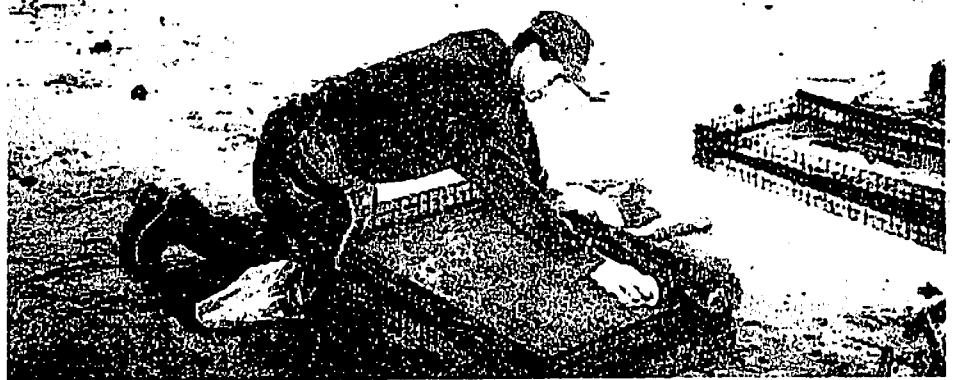
Newsletter of the Duxbury Beach Preservation Society

Volume 2, No. 2

Spring/Summer 1998

set out in the Bay in the spring. By fall, the shellfish—now the size of a quarter—are ready to leave the nursery trays. The quahogs are “planted” into the sandy bottom and covered with mesh, while the oysters are left in trays on the surface to mature. Both types of shellfish take approximately two years to reach a harvestable size. During this time they spawn seed into the surrounding water, augmenting nearby wild shellfish beds. The comparatively fast-growing surf clams, in contrast, are purchased as seed in the fall, left in deep water during winter, planted in the spring and harvested that summer.

Anyone who has ventured out with bucket and rake in hand with the hope of finding enough clams for dinner appreciates the seeming impossibility of harvesting several hundred thousand clams by hand. However, the high density of cultivated clams—50 per square foot—allows an aquaculture farmer to harvest up to 10,000 in a single tide. Aquaculture also allows the farmer to grow a variety of shellfish that may not be indigenous to the local area. Indeed, Bennett is collaborating with the Town of Duxbury in growing oyster seed for release into the Bay in an attempt to create wild oyster beds for recreational harvest. Besides enhancing our enjoyment of Duxbury Bay, this would further Massachusetts' goal of promoting aquaculture as a way to help maintain healthy shellfish populations in its coastal waters.



Farming Duxbury Bay

Aquaculture has joined the myriad recreational and commercial uses of Duxbury Bay. For the past seven years, Skip Bennett of Duxbury has “grown” shellfish on a 1.5 acre parcel of the Bay granted to him by the Town of Duxbury. His crop includes quahogs—the generic term for little neck, cherry stone and chowder clams—as well as oysters and surf clams. He presently is the sole aquaculture farmer in Duxbury, although two other individuals are in the process of applying for grants from the Town.

Bennett traces his interest in aquaculture to his college summer and weekend jobs digging mussels in Duxbury. Although he studied finance at college, the lure of making a living on Duxbury Bay proved too enticing

to resist. His farming career has flourished. Last year, Bennett planted half a million each of quahogs and oysters, as well as 20,000 surf clams, which he hopes to sell to an Asian market next summer. His first oyster harvest last year won rave reviews. Since oyster taste is area specific—determined by the amount of a natural antifreeze produced by the oyster in response to its surrounding water temperature—“Duxbury Oysters” one day could be as renowned as “Duxbury Mussels” are throughout the United States.

Shellfish farming follows seasonal cycles similar to those in traditional agriculture. “Nursery” trays of minuscule quahogs and oysters only 3-8 millimeters in diameter, yet already complete with miniature shells, are

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